



Nu-Scents Wholesale, LLC

Lye (Sodium Hydroxide) Safety Precautions

Cold process soap making is an age old tradition that has become a beloved functional art form. However, lye is a caustic chemical that can be very dangerous. Countless people make soap without complications every day by becoming familiar with the safety hazards of working with lye. Please follow these basic safety precautions when using lye to ensure a secure and harmless soap making environment.

Treat lye with care—Lye is caustic, poisonous, and can cause severe burns, therefore, utmost caution must be used at all times.

Read and follow safety warnings and instructions on the container of lye—This will further educate and aid in avoiding preventable accidents and surprises.

Work in a well-ventilated area that is protect from drafts—Be careful not to inhale the dust when working with lye; it is harmful to the lungs. The fumes from lye/water (especially in large batches or prolonged contact with fumes) can burn the eyes and skin of sensitive people. (If your face feels “sunburned” after making soap, it was probably caused by the fumes.) If indoors, use the exhaust hood when mixing lye. Otherwise, mix the lye outside. Wearing a mask will also further protect against the dust and/or fumes.

Create an adequate work space—Plenty of space is ideal for soap making. Soap making is easier when there is access to the sink and stove. Pick an area that can be undisturbed for a few hours.

Protect all work surfaces and equipment—Lye reacts with certain metals such as aluminum, zinc, magnesium, chromium, brass, bronze, iron, cast iron, Teflon, and tin. Avoid wood equipment, the lye eats away at it over time. Lye will eat laminate, Formica, and linoleum. Lye can remove paint. If lye, lye/water mix, or freshly made soap splash onto a painted surface, immediately wipe it off, wash the area with detergent, rinse with clear water, and wipe dry (use old rags, because lye weakens cloth fiber). Be sure to cover all surfaces with multiple layers of newspaper or heavy duty waxed freezer paper. Some safe surfaces/equipment materials include heatproof stoneware, glass, enamel, stainless steel, hard rubber, silicone, and heavy duty plastic.

Protect your body— Remove all jewelry (lye corrodes metals). Wear protective goggles, rubber gloves, long sleeve shirts, long pants, close fitting clothing, socks, and closed toed shoes to ensure your skin and eyes are protected. If lye contacts the skin, flush the area with ordinary vinegar and wash well with soap and water (until the slippery feeling disappears). If lye gets in the eye, call your local poison control center or go to the emergency room immediately. Lye can be fatal if swallowed. If lye or lye/water is ingested, DO NOT induce vomiting, call your local poison control center or go immediately to the emergency room. When handling raw soap and fresh soap, wear rubber gloves and goggles (if in doubt about how neutralized the soap is, wear goggles and gloves to be on the safe side).

Never leave the area unattended—Leaving caustic materials unattended can be dangerous.

Always add the lye to the water—Never the other way around! EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.

Use two hands when moving your container of lye or lye/water—This will ensure that you do not lose any lye, it will reduce the possibility of accidental burns, and will decrease the chances of losing any lye/water thus requiring starting the soap making over again.

Pour carefully and in a steady stream—Take your time and be careful not to splash!

Keep equipment and materials in the center of the working area—To prevent hazardous spills, do not place bowls, pots, etcetera near the edge of the counter.

Never reuse lye containers, molds, stirring spoons, etcetera for other purposes—Soap making supplies become contaminated—the lye remains on the items even after they have been cleaned—and should thus never be used for alternative functions.

Do not attempt to heat lye in the microwave or on the stove

Eliminate distractions—Children, pets, music, etcetera should be kept away from the work area until the area and the equipment are cleaned and put away. Concentration is key when working with lye and distractions could become dangerous.

Let soap cure undisturbed—Lye remains corrosive until fully cured. Keep children and pets away from the soap.

Keep lye tightly capped when not in use—Lye crystals can absorb water from the air which can reduce the strength of the lye or cause the lye to form a solid lump.

Store lye in a safe location—Keep it far out of reach of children, pets, people with special needs, heat, and moisture. Keep lye away from cooking or food storage containers. Clearly and visibly label the container DANGER! Sodium Hydroxide (Lye).

Never dispose of lye or raw alkaline soap without first researching local landfill regulations—Lye and raw soap are toxic and hazardous.

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